
A Glimpse at Popular Formula in ‘Chick Lit’: A New Genre of Women’s Fiction: A Textual Exploration on Hollywood’s ‘The Devil Wears Prada’ and ‘When in Rome’

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Nowadays, it is at the bookstore, the new genre of woman fiction, which is known as Chick Lit, sold under various titles. Chick Lit, the books with the pastel colour covers depicting swirly, cartoon-ish women are selling wildly and being turned into movies and television shows, such as Helen Fielding’s ‘*Bridget Jones’s Diary*’(1998) and Candace Bushnell’s ‘*Sex and the City*’(1999)

‘Chick’ is an American slang for young woman and ‘Lit’ is short for Literature. The term appeared in print as early as 1993 as college slang for the ‘female literary tradition’. The term ‘Chick Lit’ most often refers to fictions marketed towards young, single working women, especially those in their 20s and 30s. The root of the term may have originated with the novel ‘Bridget Jones’ Diary’, a novel by Helen Fielding. The titles labelled as Chick Lit often features a young, stylish woman or women as the protagonist, and the setting is often a fashionable, urban area. The stories frequently follow the protagonist through her work and personal life issues and often incorporate sexual themes.

However, *Chick Lit* also means books written by women for women, and the audience varies from the ages 20 to post 60. Often, the books incorporate a light humorous tone and involve real life issues, including weight problems and addictions. Some books in this genre are told from a first person point of view. *Chick Lit* books often contain humor and a sarcastic tone. Often, the main character is separated by physical distance from her family, and she often has many issues affecting her life at any given time. Most often, a *Chick Lit* book involves a romantic relationship at least as a subplot.

In analyzing the underlying reason why *Chick Lit* became so popular among young women, it is necessary to figure out the formulas of this genre, which eventually serve as the stereotypical pattern in various number of *Chick Lit*. Thus this article aims at exploring the formulae in *Chick Lit* and also to give an elaborate description of the statistical data on the sales of these two novels worldwide. The article will also focus on two famous *Chick Lit* novels Lauren Weisberg’s ‘*The Devil Wears Prada*’ and Gemma Townley’s ‘*When in Rome*’.

Lauren Weisberg wrote ‘*The Devil Wears Prada*’ in 2003 and it got filmed in 2006. This *Chick Lit* is a delightful dishy novel about the all time most impossible boss in the history of impossible bosses. Andrea Sachs, a small- time girl fresh out of college, lands a job ‘a million girls would die for’. Hired as the assistant to Miranda Priestly, the high profile, and fabulously successful editor of “Runaway Magazine”.

'The Devil Wears Prada' is a 2006-comedy drama-film, a loose screen adaptation of Lauren Weinberger's 2003 novel of the same name. It stars Anne Hathaway as Andy Sachs, a recent college graduate who goes to New York City and gets a job as a co-assistant to powerful and demanding fashion magazine editor Miranda Priestley, played by Meryl Streep; the film was distributed by 20th Century Fox. (www.answers.com)

Meanwhile, *'When in Rome'* was written by Gemma Townley in 2004 and it has not been filmed yet. This novel's protagonist is George Beauchamp who is trapped between choices. She is totally happy and in love with her wonderful, dependable boy friend, David. However, she always daydreams about running into her gorgeous ex-boyfriend Mike. When Georgie's daydream actually comes true, she is dressed in unglamorous sweats and carrying and carrying a curtain rod down the street, while Mike is driving an expensive sports car and looking better than Brad Pitt at the Oscars. She longs to have the glamorous life Mike can offer – and starts to think that he might want her back in his arms.

From the short synopsis of those novels, it can be summarized that both of them tell the readers about the novels usually explore the personal professional, and romantic lives of young, single, working women who serve as the embodiment of women's fantasy. Moreover, the protagonists face the modern life problems such as love, marriage, dating, relationships, friendships, jobs, weight problems and many other women related issues.

As a part of popular literature, *Chick Lit* has a formula that recurrently exists in umpteen numbers of novels. Studying literary formulas is important in studying popular literature for several reasons. First, formulas are ways in which specific cultural themes and stereotypes become embodied in more universal story archetypes. From this perspective, formula is very similar to the conception of genre. Second, formula is a combination or synthesis of a number of specific cultural conventions within a more universal story form or archetype. In other words, formulas are cultural products, which in turn have some sort of influence on culture because they become conventional ways of representing and relating certain images, symbols, themes, and myths (Cawelty, 1976:6)

There is a formula for *'Chick Lit'*, *'a literary genre named after the recent rush of girly books written for young women'* (Michael M. Glasburgh: 2006). According to Susan Ferris and Mallory Young (eds), 2005, there are formulas, which any novels belonging to the genre *'Chick Lit'* have:

- The protagonist is young independent woman who lives in a big city; she is career driven heroine, an obsession with appearance, and a passion for shopping
- Focus on the individual instead of a collective sisterhood
- Desire for more traditional femininity consumerism
- Female identity crisis causing fears of a man shortage, a loudly ticking biological clock, and career burnout, and
- Feelings of anxiety over ability to make the correct future decisions
- The story deals with the relationship issues
- The character grows/learns so many things at the end of a story

Referring to these formulas, it can be summarized that *'The Devil Wears Prada'* and *'When in Rome'* also follow the fixed formula and the table below describes how the writers of the novels apply the formula to their writings:

FORMULAS IN CHICK LIT	THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA	WHEN IN ROME
1. Female of 20s or 30s and lives in Metro	Andrea Sach is a fresh college graduate who goes to New York City and gets a job as a co-assistant	
2. Sisterhood is defunct	In 'The Devil Wears Prada', the only way to get ahead is to watch your own back. There is no 'we' present in the novel, ever. This is illustrated every time the office scrambles to accomplish one of Miranda's outrageous tasks. The staff seems to be working together to get it done. There is much cattiness and competition amongst the female staff with regards to aptitude for the job and, fashion statements.	Georgie Beauchamp is a young woman of 20s who lives in London
	Andrea is too busy with her job to have any time for romance. She has a long term boy friend who leaves her after almost a year of broken dates and disappointments	

<p>3. The story is dealing with relationship issues</p> <p>4. Overwhelmed by choices/it signifies Female crisis</p>	<p>Andres was not overwhelmed by the amount of choices in front of her.</p>	<p>Georgie is totally in love with her wonderful boy friend, David. However, she always day dreams about running into her gorgeous ex boy friend, Mike.</p>
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Based on those formulas, it is undeniable that the novels become the best seller because they present a very interesting storyline even though most '*Chick Lit*' presents the fairy tale like ending. The young women like reading '*Chick Lit*' due to several reasons: In today's world, where the women are expected to be smart and ambitious yet wear 6 inches heels, these books are like friends; easy to relate to, intimate, funny, sarcastic, and definitely not preachy. They're a window into what's really going on inside the hearts and minds of other women. Often a form of masked memoir, '*Chick Lit*' can be light and breezy, but it can also be deeply felt stories of self-actualization. These novels provide alternatives to what culture demands of women- homemaking, Mr. Right, thin waists, and sexual fidelity- as well as amusing escapes from reality. These novels because they allow women to express desires, prove the fact that '*Chick Lit*' may be worth buying and reading only as a form of popular literature, which provides laughter, escapism, and as much temporal pleasure as the final kiss in a film.

The formula in '*Chick Lit*' seems to be the invention of the heroine's archetypal characterizations, in the true romance novels issued by Harlequin or Mills & Boons. It is the ongoing evolution of the romance genre since writers have suggested that romance writers have responded to the transformations brought about by creating heroines who are more independent and assertive, more likely to be sexually experienced and more likely to work outside the home, and who are seeking more equal partnerships. The transformations or the changing formulas of heroine's archetype occur due to some underlying thoughts to attract the readers to read this genre.

The character of '*Chick Lit*' is mainly a woman in her mid 20s or 30s who lives in a big city or urban location. The idea behind using an urban location is to provide what is assumed to be a more exciting, fast paced, high- toned lifestyle. This life style often includes designer shoes, expensive restaurants, and rich men none of which we could find if the action of the novel takes place in a small town setting. The urban setting, such as Manhattan and London, offers the audience the complexity of life, which the female character should pace and it also provides her the diverged roads she has to choose carefully which eventually leads her to

improvement at the end of the story. It can be said that characters are often shaped or influenced by the setting in some way just as real people have a relationship to their hometown or their favorite coffee shop.

The character of '*Chick Lit*' also portrays the enduring transformation from the traditional heroines. In traditional romantic novels, heroines are not normally seen as particularly career driven. Rather, they seek advancement and power through romantic alliance with a man. In this respect, the female characters in '*Chick Li*' novels seem markedly different, as they are invariably portrayed as employed and committed to the idea of a career. This invention provides fresher images of women for the audience because reading '*Chick Lit*' is like looking at the adequate mirror of the lives that modern women underwent.

The new image of modern women life is the independence and freedom that the female characters have for deciding what is best for their life. For all of the protagonists in these novels, deciding what is right for them as individuals always over rides any notion of a collective sisterhood. It seems that '*Chick Lit*' really understands what the woman needs because reading about independent woman encourages other women to be so. It can be inferred that audience seek for braver characters than previous types of heroines since '*Chick Lit*' is to modern women who have walked away from conventional codes.

Even though the female characters in '*Chick Lit*' are young independent women who seemingly do not need ant man, they all want one. In some of these books, the audience sees a fight between the desire for the traditional dream of a knight on a white horse and the insistence that they should be able to strongly face life alone and be happy about it. However, the relationship between female characters and men has largely differed from the traditional romance novels. The relationship does not always end in 'happily married' ever after but it often ends in open relationship when the female characters finally decides to break up with the boy friend or when the female character realizes that her Mr. Right turns to be Mr. Wrong. '*Chick Lit*' presents more realistic outlook of the life that life does not end with the happy ending. Moreover, it provides the picture of reality that finding soul mate is not easy, for the female character this guy is the one she has been searching for has to undergo the long winding road before she comes to the realization whether or not this guy is the one she has been searching for.

The man-woman relationship signifies the female identity crisis, a perfect picture of a woman who lives in such a big city. This is defined by popular culture's stoking the fears of a man shortage, focusing on women's biological clocks, and detailing career driven burnouts and depression in women. The depiction of a woman's daily life presented in simple languages becomes the reason why women love reading this '*Chick Lit*' genre. It enables them to laugh, to cynically smile at reading the silly mistakes of the female characters as well as well as to mirror the complexity of problems which force them to decide a wise decision so that they feel as if they were reborn as the new and mature woman figure.

The transformation in '*Chick Lit*' of women as dependent figures to women as independent figures has its social background in modern society. Modern life is high-speed dynamics, which requires the velocity of people to cope with the variety of problems in life. The

audience needs to find more modern heroine who reflects the covert culture of the society. 'Chick Lit' describes what is real in the life of modern woman that the true problems lingers on to collide between the intension of being single and happy and the inner wish that the character still needs the man besides them so that they are trapped is such a debatable question to find the right man for them.

When considering the portrayal of women in popular culture compared with how today's women are really feeling about the problems and choices they have, 'Chick Lit' provides a clear picture of how liberating their current positions can be.

CONCLUSION:

'Chick Lit' seems to be sending the message that women are free to choose anything and everything they want and they are happy about it. 'Chick Lit' tells another story. It shows the darker side where pressure about career struggles, the fear of being forever single, and the responsibility of taking charge of it all are still ever present. It shows women struggling to find their own voice and their own place of comfort.

The genre has captured the spirit of the times among young women and its popularity reaches a wide audience. In the future, 'Chick Lit' could serve as genre that discusses women's issues, prompting its readers to question gender roles, consumerism, and the global status of post- modern women.

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